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ABSTRACT

This study compares the criteria utilized by private and public school officials in the selection of beginning teachers. A similar study undertaken in Oregon (Webb 1980) was extended by incorporating private schools. Of the 117 California school districts sent questionnaires, 88 responded--a return rate of 75 percent. Twenty-nine of the private districts responded for a return rate of 64 percent; 59 of the 72 public districts returned completed questionnaires (82 percent). Forty-one criteria were included in the questionnaire: 4 academic criteria, 23 personal characteristics, and 14 teaching competencies. In general, private and public districts are looking for similar attributes in beginning teachers, with one major exception. Private districts view an applicant's personal religious or philosophical perspective as being very important, whereas public schools place little importance upon this criterion. Public and private districts are interested in the teaching competency of beginning teachers, particularly those competencies focusing on student and teacher interactions. Administrators want skilled classroom teachers who relate well to students and who have adequate but not necessarily excellent preparation in subject matter. Teacher educators should work closely with private and public schools while continuing to develop both the art and science of teaching regardless of public pressures, which actually may be contrary to known best practices. Further exploration is needed regarding what may be unique about private schools' hiring practices. (CJH)

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Hiring Criteria Used by Private Schools for the Selection of Beginning Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the criteria utilized by private and public school officials in the selection of beginning teachers. This was accomplished by partially replicating and extending a similar study undertaken in Oregon (Webb, 1980). Extension was accomplished by incorporating private schools as well as public. Forty-one criteria were included in the questionnaire: four academic criteria, 23 personal characteristics, and 14 teaching competencies. A total of 117 school districts were surveyed with a total response of 75%. Forty-five of the 117 school districts were private. [Of these forty-five districts, twenty-nine responded for a return rate of 64%.] In general, private and public districts are looking for similar attributes in beginning teachers with one major exception. Private districts view an applicant's personal religious or philosophical perspective as being very important while public schools view this criterion as being of little importance. Both public and private districts were interested in the teaching competency of beginning teachers, particularly those competencies focusing on student and teacher interactions. These findings are similar to Webb's. [This paper will focus on the findings related to private school districts and will compare those findings to the public school responses.]

**Hiring Criteria Used by Private Schools
for the Selection of Beginning Teachers**

What are the identifiable characteristics and criteria which private and public school district personnel use to select entrants into the teaching profession? No studies specifically focus on the hiring criteria utilized by private schools. According to the existing literature, there appear to be few clear clues as to what criteria may be used as good predictors of teaching success. For example, grade point average has not been a very good predictor for success in teaching (Ellsworth, Krepelka, and Kear, 1979). Haberman (1974) has indicated that academic criteria tend to predict students' future success as students and do not necessarily predict success in teaching. On the other hand, Perry's (1981) review shows that grade point average can be correlated to success in teaching.

A recent trend has been the use of standardized competency tests to assess the skills of teacher candidates. The data to support or refute the value of these tests are still unclear because their use on a broad scale is relatively recent. Other attempts to find useful criteria have not been very fruitful. In Turner (1975), Baker (1970) correlated specific factors with teacher success and found that scores from a pre-teacher training interview by a selection committee were significantly related to teacher success as measured by administrator ratings after one year of teaching experience. What seems to remain relatively constant is that earlier ratings of success in teaching predict later ratings.

Research Procedures

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of specified criteria which are presently being used by private and public school districts in the selection of beginning teachers and to identify the characteristics of candidates which influence hiring officials to prefer or reject them. In addition, this study examined differences in the relative importance of these criteria and characteristics as perceived by hiring officials in small, medium, and large elementary, secondary, and unified school districts. The private and public districts studied were all located within the six county service area of California State University, Stanislaus.

The following questions provided the focus for data analysis: (1) What are the criteria used by private school districts in the selection of beginning classroom teachers? (2) What are the characteristics displayed by teacher candidates which are preferred by private school hiring officials or which cause private school hiring officials to reject candidates possessing those characteristics? (3) What standard of performance in the identified teaching competencies is regarded as acceptable by private school hiring officials?

A questionnaire and interviews taken from a volunteer sample were utilized in the gathering of data. Personal interviews were included to corroborate the reliability of the study by determining whether the data gathered during the interviews were consistent with acquired questionnaire data.

The questionnaire used in this study was based on a research project completed by Webb (1980). Changes were made to reflect local conditions and concerns. The total number of items changed from 40 in Webb's study to 41 in the present study. The three major categories of selection criteria about which respondents were questioned

included: (a) 4 academic criteria, (b) 23 personal characteristics, and (c) 14 teaching competencies (see Table 1). A five-part Likert-type scale was used to show the degree of preference for these 41 criteria. Each of the 41 selection criteria was further divided up to a maximum of four characteristics for which respondents indicated if they would prefer, reject, or be indifferent to a candidate with these qualities. There were a total of 85 characteristics.

(Insert Table 1 here.)

The questionnaire was sent to the 117 private and public school districts having a student population over one hundred. Each superintendent was asked to have the survey completed by a hiring official who was well acquainted with the district's hiring policies or who had extensive experience in selecting beginning teachers. Of the 117 districts surveyed, 88 responses were completed and usable for a return rate of 75 percent. Twenty-nine of the 45 private school districts responded (64%) and 59 of the 72 public school districts returned completed questionnaires (82%).

Districts were designated as small when their enrollment was between 100-500; medium, 501-2000; large, 2001 and above. Table 2 shows the size and distribution of the responding districts. Private school districts tended to be composed of single schools and fell into the small category. Public school districts were more evenly distributed according to size.

(Insert Table 2 here.)

This study extended Webb's survey through the inclusion of private districts within the sample and also by incorporating the district type, namely, elementary, secondary, or unified. Eighty-two percent of the districts responding were elementary. Due to a small sample size in particular categories, data concerning the size and type of district were

limited in usefulness and were presented only when the findings were interpreted as being of practical significance.

Analysis of the Data

Selection Criteria

The survey questionnaire contained 41 selection criteria. Using a four-part Likert scale, participants were asked to rate the importance of each criterion. A criterion with a mean of 1.50 or less was determined to be very important, 1.51 - 2.50 to be somewhat important, 2.51 - 3.50 to be of little importance, and 3.51 or more to be of no importance.

Officials from private school districts chose 29 of the 41 criteria as very important and none was identified as not important. The analysis of the rank order of the means of the criteria indicated that students' performance during student teaching was very important, since 8 of the first 11 criteria were teaching competencies usually associated with the student teaching experience. The only competency not ranked unanimously as "very important" was preparedness to supervise extra-curricular activities, although no district saw it as being of no importance. The criteria found to be rated of little importance were those concerned with the personal and academic characteristics of prospective teacher candidates. These findings were similar to the findings of Webb's study.

T-tests were calculated for private school districts in order to determine if the probability differences between the means were significantly greater than chance ($p \leq .05$).

Districts were categorized according to size and the following criteria were found to have significantly higher means (i.e., less important): maintenance of effective relations with students ($p = .01$) and maintenance of effective relations with school staff ($p = .03$) were less important in small private districts than in medium private districts. Based on the type of district, health ($p = .05$), teacher union or professional organization

involvement ($p = .01$), interest in teaching as an occupation ($p = .03$), and maintenance of effective relations with students ($p = .02$) were less important in private elementary districts than in private secondary districts. Teacher union or professional organization involvement ($p = .01$), personal references ($p = .02$), source for references ($p = .02$), and the use of a variety of instructional skills ($p = .02$) were less important in private secondary districts than in private unified districts.

The criteria chosen as very important when private and public districts were combined consisted of 13 teaching competencies and 14 personal and academic characteristics. Fourteen criteria were designated as somewhat important or of little importance. No criterion was chosen as unimportant.

When viewed separately, private districts chose essentially the same criteria as very important as did public districts except in one case. Private districts placed the criterion, religious or philosophical points of view, in the category of very important while public districts selected it as of little importance. Attitude toward the handicapped was rated somewhat important by private districts and very important by the public districts. The rank orders differ only slightly between private and public districts, and these differences were not perceived to be significant in a practical sense.

Pearson product-moment and Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the degree of correlation between the means of criterion items for private and public districts; small, medium, and large districts; and elementary, secondary, and unified districts. A high degree of agreement was evident when private and public districts were correlated regarding the assessment of the importance of the criteria ($r = .97$, $r_s = .84$). Other computations produced similarly high correlations: small private and small public districts ($r = .86$, $r_s = .79$). There does not seem to be much difference as to what private and public districts are looking for in beginning teachers.

Characteristics Displayed by Teacher Candidates

Each criterion was subdivided into a maximum of four characteristics for a total of eighty-five characteristics of the selection criteria. The percentage of total responses was calculated in order to show the extent to which hiring officials preferred, rejected, or were indifferent to the characteristics studied. Due to the volume of data involved, only select data are presented:

(a) Elementary or secondary emphasis in courses. A preference (92%) was indicated by private districts for elementary candidates to have a strong elementary background.

(b) Age, marital status, residence while growing up. Both private and public districts indicated a general indifference to these criteria.

(c) Appearance and health. Both private and public districts (96%) preferred applicants who possessed a neat appearance and good health. The majority were indifferent toward grooming which differed from local standards. Also, they were generally indifferent to any disability a candidate might have.

(d) Source for references. Private districts preferred the references of the master teacher by 93 percent; school administrators' references were preferred by 68 percent, 71 percent were indifferent to the references of the college supervisor while only 29 percent preferred them; and 71 percent were indifferent to the references from a college instructor.

Performance Standards

Hiring officials were asked to indicate the response that most closely indicated the quality of performance they were prepared to accept in hiring a candidate. The scale included three responses: (1) H = we insist that the candidate must be highly proficient in this competency (upper 25 percent as compared to other beginning teachers); (2) A= we are willing to hire a candidate who has average proficiency in this competency

(middle 50 percent as compared to other beginning teachers); and (3) BA = we are willing to hire a candidate who has below average proficiency in this competency (lower 25 percent as compared to other beginning teachers).

Although the order in which teaching competencies were chosen differed, private and public districts overlapped in their selection of four out of five teaching competencies in which hiring officials would expect beginning teachers to have a high degree of competence. Hiring officials wanted their candidates to be highly proficient in vitality and enthusiasm, to maintain effective relationships with students, to maintain a classroom atmosphere which fosters learning, and to demonstrate professional and ethical behavior. On the other hand, private districts preferred that candidates be prepared to make continued improvement in their teaching behaviors and public districts highly rated the importance of the demonstration of adequate knowledge of subject matter. Preparedness to supervise extra-curricular activities was seldom expected at a high proficiency level.

A chi-square analysis was used to estimate the probability that the proportion of prefer, reject, indifferent responses across private and public districts would occur by chance. When private and public districts were compared, the following variables were found to be statistically significant ($p \leq .05$): attitude toward handicapped students; the need to see applicant in a teaching situation; maintenance of a classroom atmosphere that fosters learning; and capacity to assess student needs, progress, and achievement.

Summary

In private districts eight of this study's eleven top rated criteria with the smallest means were competencies related to a student's performance during student teaching. Of the public districts' top eleven rated criteria, nine were related to teaching competencies. In Webb's (1980) study, ten of the first eleven criteria with the smallest means were also

related to student teaching. In Cartwright's (1973) study, on which Webb based his work, only five of the first ten smallest means were related to student teaching. Interest in the competencies developed during student teaching suggests that private and public schools are concerned with skills based on a student's performance as well as knowledge based competencies.

Also, as reported by Webb and evident in this study, hiring officials sought high proficiency in skills related to interaction between students and teachers. In private and public school districts vitality and enthusiasm were viewed as important components. Academic qualifications were not viewed as important; this might be due to the present emphasis of hiring officials on classroom teaching skills.

The lowest rated criteria were not directly associated with the classroom. Age, residence while growing up, travel experience, and union affiliation were not viewed as particularly relevant to the hiring of new beginning teachers.

The main difference between private and public districts centered on the criterion of a particular religious or philosophical point of view. This criterion was very important to private districts and of little importance to public districts.

A high degree of correlation was evident between the mean ratings of hiring officials in districts of various sizes and types in private and public districts. All correlations were at least .79 with many being in the .90+ range. Differences between the means were very small as were the variances; they became larger as the importance of the items decreased.

The attempt to break the districts into various categories provided few useful results since half the sample sizes were ten or less and most of the districts involved in the study were elementary districts (82%). Some significant differences ($p \leq .05$) were

evidenced between public districts of varying sizes.

Few criteria were widely accepted as being suitable for rejecting a candidate. Most private districts tended to reject candidates based upon an uncertainty of moral soundness or generally critical personal references. Private and public districts rejected overt bigots, those candidates who did not speak or write in a manner reflecting proper usage, and individuals of below average intelligence.

Much of what hiring officials looked for was based on competencies as evidenced through student teacher evaluations. Of the various competencies considered important, most focused on teacher-student interactions. Master teacher and administrator references were more highly regarded than those of the college supervisor or instructor.

Emphasis was placed on many personal characteristics such as appearance, correct writing and speaking skills, a lack of bias, being warm and outgoing, and having integrity. These characteristics, along with the competencies discussed above, tended to be more important than academic preparation. Administrators seemed to want skilled classroom teachers who relate well with students, who are excellent models for the youth they teach, and who have adequate but not necessarily excellent preparation in the subject matter being taught.

There appeared to be considerable agreement among various private and public districts regardless of size or type as to the relative importance of the criteria utilized in this study. These findings closely parallel those determined by Webb, thus adding greater credibility to his findings. Overall, there did not appear to be much difference as to what private and public districts were looking for in beginning teachers.

Discussion

Given the limitations associated with surveys, the findings reported here nevertheless do suggest some interesting questions and possible dilemmas for teacher educators from both the private and public sectors. For example, if vitality and enthusiasm are highly desirable qualities for student teachers to possess, can these qualities be taught? Would teacher educators be able to substantiate an absence of these skills in a court of law if needed? Affective attributes, although very desirable, tend to be among the most difficult to assess and to teach.

Also, there continues to be an expressed need on the part of hiring officials for student teachers with excellent classroom management skills. Can these management skills be satisfactorily taught when it is quite possible that the reasons the lack of classroom control has become such a problem is due to changing values and a questioning of public attitudes toward those in positions of authority? Can teacher educators successfully teach skills which may be contrary to individual or to societal values about the nature of authority?

A concern of hiring officials for performance based teaching competencies suggests that teacher educators will need to continue to be aware of hiring officials' expectations when selecting beginning teachers in order to keep our students well informed of hiring practices. But teacher educators must continue to address their responsibility to train teachers based on the best data available as to which practices will develop the most effective classroom teachers. The challenge is for teacher educators to work closely with private and public schools while continuing to develop both the science and art of teaching regardless of public pressures which in some cases may be contrary to known best practices. Also, further exploration is needed regarding what may be unique about private schools' hiring practices.

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Table 1

Questionnaire Items*

Academic Criteria

1. College degree earned
2. Overall grade point average in college
3. Emphasis in courses taken: Elementary candidates
4. Emphasis in courses taken: Secondary candidates

Personal Characteristics

5. Age
6. Marital status
7. Residence while growing up
8. Intelligence
9. Appearance
10. Health
11. Letter of application
12. Speech
13. Attitude toward children who are culturally different
14. Attitude toward handicapped students
15. Teacher union or professional organization involvement (California Teachers' Association or American Federation of Teachers)
16. Prior involvement in community organizations
17. Travel experience
18. Interest in teaching as an occupation (principle reason for choice)
19. Prior experience in working with children or youth
20. Emotional adjustment
21. Enthusiasm
22. Personal integrity
23. Personal references
24. Source for references
25. Educational philosophy toward innovation
26. A particular religious or philosophical point of view
27. Need to see applicant in a teaching situation

Teaching Competencies

28. Demonstration of adequate knowledge of the subject matter
29. Selection and use of appropriate teaching materials
30. Vitality and enthusiasm
31. Ability to maintain pace and sequence of learning activities
32. Preparation and use of effective instructional plans
33. Use of a variety of instructional strategies
34. Maintenance of a classroom atmosphere that fosters learning
35. Capacity to assess student needs, progress, and achievement
36. Demonstration of professional and ethical behavior
37. Maintenance of effective relations with students
38. Maintenance of effective relations with school staff
39. Preparedness to make continuing improvement in teaching behaviors
40. Willingness to accept leadership and responsibility
41. Preparedness to supervise extra-curricular activities

- * Each of the 41 criteria was further subdivided from one to four related characteristics for which respondents' indicated if they would prefer, reject, or be indifferent to a candidate with these qualities. There were a total of 85 characteristics of the 41 criteria.

Table 2

Number of Districts Responding According to Size

	Small 100-500	Medium 501-2000	Large 2001+	Total
Public	19	25	15	59
Private	25	4	0	29
Total	44	29	15	88